

**Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials  
April 27 – 28, 2006  
Mission Inn - Riverside, CA  
Minutes**

**Committee Members Present:**

Jerry Laws, Chairman	John Kelly
James Adams	Myllo Kraja
Judy Bissinger	Rose Elizabeth Lee
Stan Brown	Thomas Lockhart
Bob Cardenas	Joe Martory
Wilfred Ebel	Ben Spadaro

**Committee Members Absent:**

James Altmeyer  
Carl Kikerpill

**Ex-Officio Members Present:**

Tom Sole, American Battle Monuments Commission

**Ex-Officio Members Absent:**

Ed Bearss, National Park Service  
Jack Metzler, Jr., Arlington National Cemetery

**National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Attendees:**

The Honorable William F. Tuerk, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs  
Richard A. Wannemacher, Jr., Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs  
Steve Muro, Director, Office of Field Programs  
Mike Nacincik, Designated Federal Officer, Chief, Communications and Outreach Support Division  
Bill Jayne, Acting Director, Office of Construction Management  
Lynn Howell, Director, Policy and Planning  
Ray Kempisty, Outreach Coordinator and Advisory Committee Program Manager

**Public Attendees:**

Joe Vargo, Staff Writer for the Press-Enterprise

Representative from the Miller-Jones Mortuary

### **Wednesday, April 27, 2006**

The second meeting of the VA Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials for Fiscal Year 2006 was held at the Mission Inn's San Diego West conference room, 3649 Mission Inn Avenue, Riverside, California.

### **Call to Order and Welcome**

Chairman Laws called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Laws introduced the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, The Honorable William F. Tuerk

### **Remarks by Under Secretary Tuerk**

Under Secretary Tuerk began by greeting the committee members. He then emphasized that keeping the existing national cemeteries open and at shrine status is his first priority and then the opening of new state and national cemeteries to serve the needs of veterans. By 2010, twenty new state veterans cemeteries and eleven new national cemeteries will be opened. This is a time of growth and expansion. In 2005, four new national cemeteries were opened: the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies at Pittsburgh; Great Lakes National Cemetery near Detroit; and two state veterans cemeteries, one in central Texas, Killeen, outside Ft. Hood and the northern California state veteran cemetery in Redding. The 123<sup>rd</sup> national cemetery opened on April 24, 2006 near Atlanta, the Georgia National Cemetery. The dedication is on June 4<sup>th</sup>. The cemetery near Sacramento is due to open in the fall. The new national cemetery in Palm Beach County in south Florida will soon be under contract. The Under Secretary informed the committee that six additional new cemeteries mandated by Congress are works in progress. The property acquisition and environmental analysis are underway at: Philadelphia, Jacksonville, Sarasota, Birmingham, Bakersville and Columbia/Greenville. NCA is on track to provide a burial option at a state veterans or national cemetery to 90% of veterans within a 75 mile radius by the year 2010.

### **Appointment/Re-appointment Issues**

Under Secretary Tuerk reminded the Committee that twelve of the fourteen current Advisory Committee members' terms expire on August 31, 2006. The Office of the Under Secretary will work with the Secretary to review the size and composition of the committee. The charter states, "The Committee will be comprised of members of the public with a variety of backgrounds and sufficient knowledge to provide adequate service and guidance to the Secretary". In addition, there are three ex-officio members, one each from the ABMC, Department of the Interior's National Park Service, and the

Department of the Army's Arlington National Cemetery. The Under Secretary's role is to recommend appointments that will best assist the Secretary to carry out his responsibilities with respect to the administration of the national cemeteries, selection of new national cemetery sites, and other matters. Recommendations come primarily from the White House but they may be made by the general public or by any individual. The Office of the Under Secretary reviews and recommends nominations to the Secretary. The Secretary makes final appointments to the committee. Under Secretary Tuerk is going to recommend the new appointments and re-appointments be made with a mixture of one and two year terms to avoid many terms expiring at once and to preserve continuity. By August, committee members will be notified by the Secretary of his determination if a member will or will not continue to serve on the committee.

### **NCA Issues Update**

Mr. Wannemacher represented the Under Secretary at the opening of Georgia National Cemetery. There was a combination of twenty interments/inurnments that day. It will be dedicated on June 4, 2006. On November 11, 2005, the Memorial Support Committee donated an avenue of flags at the Great Lakes National Cemetery. Recently at South Florida National Cemetery, Under Secretary Tuerk had an opportunity to show the Congressmen and local veteran community what to expect. He was present for the unveiling of a model and the naming ceremony. In addition, Under Secretary Tuerk was on hand to award State Cemetery Grants funds to Governor Mark Sanford of South Carolina and Governor Ernie Fletcher of Kentucky. State Cemetery Grants Program construction for fiscal year 2006 includes six new cemetery construction projects, including one in Saipan. SCGP expansion and improvements are funded for Massachusetts State Veterans Cemetery, B G Doyle Veterans Cemetery, Southern NV Veterans Cemetery and North Dakota Veterans Cemetery. Funds have also been allocated for design. Mr. Wannemacher ended his briefing by recognizing the outstanding number of hours of volunteerism at national cemeteries. Some 381,191 hours were accumulated by volunteers in the areas of honor guards, ceremonies, miniature flags, memorial inventory, beautification, administration, and public/customer service.

### **Field Operations Update**

Mr. Muro began his presentation by stating the missions of VA, NCA, and Field Programs. He offered a brief status of the national cemeteries: 63 are open, 21 are open to cremation only, 39 are closed. That totals 123. Eleven cemeteries are under development. He reviewed burial benefits: grave site and grave liner; open and closing of the grave; perpetual care of the grave site; a headstone or marker; a U. S. flag; and a Presidential Memorial Certificate. Interment eligibility and headstone or marker eligibility differ because no headstone or marker is provided for a spouse or dependent child if they are buried in a private cemetery. The ten most active national cemeteries, ranked by the number of burials are: Riverside, CA; Florida; Calverton, NY; Ft. Snelling, MN; Jefferson Barracks, MO; Ft. Sam Houston, TX; Ft. Logan, CO; Willamette, OR; National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona; and Houston, TX.

Part of the perpetual care of the grave is ensuring a thick, healthy, weed-free turf. Achieving national shrine appearance standards entails: proper fertilization; persistent control of weeds and pests; annual over-seeding; annual aerification; proper mowing practices; periodic thatch removal; and trees and shrubs properly pruned. Mr. Muro devised a cemetery scorecard, having 22 items, that he carries with him and has distributed to national cemetery directors.

Mr. Muro told the Committee about the progress of the NCA National Training Center. It provides training in the areas of: supervisor training, cemetery rep training, foreman training, and OAI training. A second class of Cemetery Director Interns will graduate in June. Some new cutting edge innovations at the cemeteries that help with safety, manpower, and efficiency include: headstone haulers, Toro mower/trimmers, lowering devices, headstone sprayer and cleaners, mechanical lifts, and casket hearses.

### **Veteran Demographics and NCA**

Ms. Howell began her presentation to the Committee by repeating the goal to meet the needs of unserved veterans within a 75 mile service area, using a 170,000 threshold, by the year 2010. She went on to give quite a bit of data in the form of charts and graphs. The veteran plans for burial in a national or state veterans cemetery were 14.1% yes, and 59.0% no, not aware. The number was almost 19% yes, aware. The main reasons for wanting to be buried in a national cemetery were: 47.2% honor of burial in a national shrine, 26.9% cost, 16.9% friends or family buried there, 10% quality of services, and 23.4% other. Among the top reasons for not wanting to be buried in a national cemetery were: 44.6% wanted a location close to other family members, and 41.2% made other arrangements.

The projected veteran population is decreasing. The veteran population by those of the female gender is increasing from about 6.1% in 2000 to 13.2% by 2030. The top ten states having the highest veteran populations now and figures for 2020 are as follows: New York, 48% decrease by 2020; Illinois, 47% decrease; California, 45% decrease; Pennsylvania, 43%; Ohio, 36%; Michigan, 36%; Texas, 26%; Florida, 26%; North Carolina, 22%; and Georgia, 17%. Projected veteran deaths from World War II, the Korean Conflict, Vietnam, and the Gulf War through the year 2030 were explored. Interments in national cemeteries are expected to peak in 2009 and then decrease over time as veteran populations decrease. NCA will be opening new national cemeteries to meet those demands.

A valuable tool for assessing additional future needs is the Burial Benefits Program Evaluation. The evaluation will be conducted by a contractor and will provide an independent, objective view of program outcomes and current policy. The data revealed will help VA to plan to meet the changing needs and expectations of beneficiaries and families. Areas of study are: burial trends that may change the way burial benefits are delivered; changing information technology capabilities; identification of policy and/or legislative options; a public/published document that will inform

stakeholders and drive change; and ability to continue to integrate budget and performance. The evaluation timeline is as follows: 2006 – Veteran Demographic Review, 2006 – Statement of Work, 2006 – Request for Proposal, 2007 – Award Contract, 2008 – Draft program Evaluation, 2008 – Final Program Evaluation, 2008 – Policy/Legislative Options Presented.

### **Construction Update**

Mr. Jayne continues to serve as Acting Director of Construction Management. He began his presentation for the Office of Construction Management by telling the committee that the office consists of two services: the Project Support Service and the Project Management Service. The staff is comprised of about twenty-one people. Of the major construction funds for fiscal year 2006, \$79 million is planned, \$8 million is obligated, \$38 million is pending. For the minor construction projects, those under \$7 million to complete, \$36 million is planned, \$20 million is obligated, \$9.5 million is pending for fiscal year 2006.

The new national cemeteries under the Millennium Act are: Oklahoma City, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Atlanta (which are opened), Sacramento, and South Florida. The Pittsburgh area cemetery has Phase 1A completed and Phase 1B is to be awarded in spring of 2006. The Detroit cemetery, Great Lakes National Cemetery, will award the contractor documents for Phase 1B in the summer of 2006. Georgia National Cemetery, in the Atlanta area, has Phase 1 under construction. It includes administrative and maintenance buildings, shelters, and 5900 crypts. The Sacramento area cemetery, which is not yet named, has suffered construction delay because of rainfall but a winter of 2006-2007 opening is still projected. The South Florida National Cemetery is about to award to a team that is putting forth great effort. Weather permitting, Phase 1A will open in the fall of 2006. Phase 1B contractor documents will be awarded in the spring of 2006.

The new national cemeteries under Public Law 108-109 are: Southeastern Pennsylvania, Bakersfield, Columbia-Greenville, Jacksonville, Sarasota County, and Birmingham. In Southeastern Pennsylvania, a 200 acre, preferred site has been named in Bucks County. In Bakersfield, the environmental assessment is done. In Columbia-Greenville, the most favorable site is at Ft. Jackson. For the proposed national cemetery in Jacksonville, the public comment period of environmental assessment is completed and they are working on the decision of a site. In Sarasota County, the record of decision is being reviewed and may be signed soon. A preferred alternative site will be chosen. The site near Birmingham just got the preliminary draft environmental assessment for review. The public comment period will follow.

### **Volunteer Services at Riverside National Cemetery**

Stan Brown began with a brief history of the civil and military relationships in the area, including that of the Mission Inn. Frank Miller, owner of the hotel at the time, and the City of Riverside Chamber worked to bring an Army Air Field to Riverside at the outset

of WWI. The base expanded during the 1920s and 1930s. It doubled in size during WWII. The land adjacent to March Field was acquired by the U.S. Army in 1940. The Mission Inn was the Palm Springs of the time. Troops were entertained and military couples were wed at the hotel. Camp William G. Haan was used for Coast Artillery/Anti-Aircraft Training and a POW Camp during WWII. It was unused following the war and declared excess in the 1970s.

In the early 1970s, community leaders and Rep. George Brown ensured that Riverside was added to the list for a Southern California cemetery. Admiral Jack McCain, chair of the Presidential Commission, visited the Camp Haan site, escorted by then Colonel Stan Brown. Those involved dedicated themselves to making Riverside more than another "garden of stones". Riverside National Cemetery was dedicated on Veterans Day 1978. The first interment was Riverside native and posthumous Medal of Honor recipient, Ysmael Villegas. Volunteer organizations lead to the creation of the Medal of Honor Memorial, over a two year period. The Memorials and Monuments Commission was formed. The Riverside National Cemetery (RNC) Long Range Plan (LRP) was approved in 2001 by NCA. The RNC Support Committee was created upon RNC dedication by Roland Lex. The Memorial Honor Detail was founded by the County VSO in May 1996. The Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce was a vital organization in the creation and development of RNC. Other significant organizations include: the March Joint Powers Authority, the March Air Reserve Base and Tenant Commands, the National Guard and area Reserve Commands, the County Veterans Services Office, the VSOs, the other Chambers of Commerce within the Inland Empire, the VA Volunteer Services at Loma Linda VA Medical Center, and funeral homes.

Mark Maynard continued the presentation with details of the volunteer groups and commissions at RNC, outlining their many contributions and special projects. The RNC also works closely with the Chamber of Commerce in outreach activities.

Stan Brown returned to provide details of the RNC's Long Range Plan (LRP). The process for having monuments and memorials approved and implemented are: site approval from NCA, concept approval from NCA, fundraising activities, engineering package approval from NCA, and start of construction. The Medal of Honor Memorial, the Veteran's Memorial, and the POW/MIA Memorial have all been completed. The currently proposed memorials are: the American Indian Memorial, the Vietnam Wall Memorial, the Korean Memorial, and the WWII Memorial. Future projects will include: the WWI, Civil War Service, and Revolutionary War Service, Four Chaplains of U.S.S. Dorchester Memorials, and the Ethnic American Statues.

#### **Thursday, April 28, 2006**

The Committee met at 8:30 a.m. and departed for RNC. After entering the cemetery grounds, the committee viewed an overlook of the developed and undeveloped portions from a hilltop. Several stops were made throughout the tour of the cemetery. The first stop was at the impressive Medal of Honor Memorial. Next was the Amphitheater overlooking Lake B. Then the committee traveled to Lake A and saw the future sites of

the American Indian and Vietnam Wall Memorials. They also viewed the POW/MIA Memorial and had a wreath laying ceremony at the Veterans Memorial. The committee viewed the site of crypt burials in progress. The cemetery is beautifully maintained and will serve the needs of veterans for years to come.

### **Committee Business Session**

The session began promptly at 2:00pm.

### **Recap of Recommendations and Endorsements from November, 2005 Advisory Committee Meeting in Washington, DC**

**Recommendation 1:** Each new Advisory Committee member will have an opportunity to attend an orientation at Jefferson Barracks training center and cemetery.

**Recommendation 2:** Explore the creation of regional signature cemeteries, form within the VA National Cemetery Administration cemeteries, geographically dispersed throughout the United States. The signature cemeteries would focus on the education of young Americans on the service of the people who are now serving and who have served in the military and focus on improving their knowledge of the history of the United States.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee fully endorses all initiatives to explore acquiring properties through BRAC and CARES for building new cemeteries and expanding existing cemeteries.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee commends the Office of Field Programs for issuance of a Mission Statement.

NCA responses were not available at the time of the meeting.

### **Draft of New Recommendations:**

Chairman Laws led the formulation of recommendations. All were approved unanimously. They are:

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee urges the Secretary to allocate such funds as necessary to print local cemetery brochures for the 10 national cemeteries with the greatest rate of interments.

**Recommendation 2:** The Committee endorses continued evaluation and efforts to study burial benefits including service area and population threshold.

**Recommendation 3:** The Committee recommends demographic study information as was presented at this meeting by Lynn Howell be made available to the Committee at each meeting.

**Recommendation 4:** The Committee endorses and supports the position of the Secretary on the statement of administration policy related to HR 5037 and S 2452.

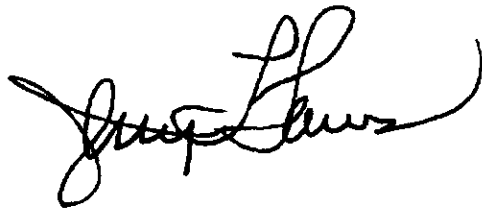
**Recommendation 5:** The Committee commends General Stan Brown for hosting this meeting and giving the Committee the opportunity to witness and evaluate the educational opportunities and new concepts being implemented at Riverside National Cemetery and recommends that VA and NCA explore the expansion of these innovations in the future.

### **New Business**

Chairman Laws asked the Committee to choose a date for the fall meeting. The dates chosen were November 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. The location will be Washington, DC. Chairman Laws requested final comments from members who may not return because their terms have expired. Chairman Laws adjourned the meeting.



Michael Nacincik  
Designated Federal Officer



Jerry Laws  
Chair